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Against The Neo-Pagans

Extracted from "Grundrisse" by Julius Evola

The Misunderstandings of the New "Paganism"

It is perhaps appropriate to point out the misunderstandings that are current at the moment in some radical circles, who believe that a solution lies in the direction of a new paganism. This misunderstanding is already visible in the use of terms such as "pagan" and "pagandom". I myself, having used these expressions as slogans in a book that was published in Italy in 1928, and in Germany in 1934, have cause for sincere regrets.

Certainly the word for pagan or heathen, *paganus*, appears in some ancient Latin writers such as Livy without an especially negative tone. But this does not alter the fact that with the arrival of the new faith, the word *paganus* became a decidedly disparaging expression, as used in early Christian apologetics. It derives from *pagus*, meaning a small town or village, so that *paganus* refers to the peasant way of thinking: an uncultured, primitive, and superstitious way. In order to promote and glorify the new faith, the apologists had the bad habit of elevating themselves through the denigration of other faiths. There was often a conscious and often systematic disparagement and misrepresentation of almost all the earlier traditions, doctrines, and religions, which were grouped under the contemptuous blanket-term of paganism or heathendom. To this end, the apologists obviously made a premeditated effort to highlight those aspects of the pre-Christian religions and traditions that lacked any normal or primordial character, but were clearly forms that had fallen into decay. Such a polemical procedure led, in particular, to the characterization of whatever had preceded Christendom, and was hence non-Christian, as necessarily anti-Christian.

One should consider, then, that "paganism" is a fundamentally tendentious and artificial concept that scarcely corresponds to the historical reality of what the pre-Christian world always was in its normal manifestations, apart from a few decadent elements and aspects that derived from the degenerate remains of older cultures.

Once we are clear about this, we come today to a paradoxical realization: that this imaginary paganism that never existed, but was invented by Christian apologists, is now serving as the starting-point for certain so-called pagan circles, and is thus threatening for the first time in history to become a reality--no more and no less than that.

What are the main traits of today's pagan outlook, as its own apologists believe and declare them to be? The primary one is the imprisonment in Nature. All transcendence is totally unknown to the pagan view of life: it remains stuck in a mixture of Spirit and Nature, in an ambiguous unity of Body and Soul. There is nothing to its religion but a superstitious deification of natural phenomena, or of tribal energies promoted to the status of minor gods. Out of this there arises first of all a blood- and soil-bound particularism. Next comes a rejection of the values of personality and freedom, and a condition of innocence that is merely that of the natural man, as yet unawakened to any truly supranatural calling. Beyond this innocence there is only lack of inhibition, "sin," and the pleasure of sinning. In other domains there is nothing but superstition, or a purely profane culture of materialism and fatalism. It is as though only the arrival of Christianity (ignoring certain precursors which are dismissed as insignificant) allowed the world of supranatural freedom to break through, letting in grace and personality, in contrast to the fatalistic and nature-bound beliefs ascribed to "paganism," bringing with it a catholic ideal (in the etymological sense of universality) and a healthy dualism, which made it possible to subjugate Nature to a higher law, and for the "Spirit" to triumph over the law of flesh, blood, and the false gods.

These are the main traits of the dominant understanding of paganism, i.e., of everything that does not entail a specifically Christian world-view. Anyone who possesses any direct acquaintance with

cultural and religious history, however elementary, can see how incorrect and one-sided this attitude is. Besides, in the early Church Fathers there are often signs of a higher understanding of the symbols, doctrines, and religions of preceding cultures. Here we will give only a sampling.

What most distinguished the pre-Christian world, in all its normal forms, was not the superstitious divinization of nature, but a symbolic understanding of it, by virtue of which (as I have often emphasized) every phenomenon and every event appeared as the sensible revelation of a suprasensible world. The pagan understanding of the world and of man was essentially marked by sacred symbolism.

Moreover, the pagan way of life was absolutely not that of a mindless innocence, nor a natural abandonment to the passions, even if certain forms of it were obviously degenerate. It was already aware of a healthy dualism, which is reflected in its universal religious or metaphysical conceptions. Here we can mention the dualistic warrior-religion of the ancient Iranian Aryans, already discussed and familiar to all; the Hellenistic antithesis between the "two natures," between World and Underworld, or the Nordic one between the race of the Ases and the elementary beings; and lastly the Indo-Aryan contrast between *sams'ra*, the "stream of forms," and *m(o)kthi*, "liberation" and "perfection."

On this basis, all the great pre-Christian cultures shared the striving for a supra-natural freedom, i.e., for the metaphysical perfection of the personality, and they all acknowledged Mysteries and initiations. I have already pointed out that the Mysteries often signified the reconquest of the primordial state, the spirituality of the solar, Hyperborean races, on the foundation of a tradition and a knowledge that were concealed through secrecy and exclusivity from the pollutions of an environment already in decay. We have also seen that in the Eastern lands, the Aryan quality was already associated with a "second birth" achieved through initiation. As for natural innocence as the pagan cult of the body, that is a fairy-tale and not even in evidence among savages, for despite the inner lack of differentiation already mentioned in connection with races "close to nature," these people inhibit and constrict their lives through countless taboos in a way that is often stricter than the morality of the so-called "positive religions." And as for that which seems to the superficial view to embody the prototype of such "innocence," namely the classical ideal, that was no cult of the body: it did not belong on that side of the body-spirit duality, but on the other side. As already stated, the classic ideal is that of a Spirit that is so dominant that under certain favorable spiritual conditions it molds Body and Soul to its own image, and thereby achieves a perfect harmony between the inner and the outer.

Lastly, there is an aspiration away from particularism to be found everywhere in the "pagan" world, to which was due the imperial summons that marked the ascending phase of the Nordic-derived races. Such a summons was often metaphysically enhanced and refined, and appeared as the natural consequence of the expansion of the ancient sacred state-concept; also as the form in which the victorious presence of the "higher world" and the paternal, Olympian principle sought to manifest itself in the world of becoming. In this respect we might recall the old Iranian concept of Empire and of the "King of kings," with its associated doctrine of the *hvarenu* (the "celestial glory" with which the Aryan rulers were endowed), and the Indo-Aryan tradition of the "World-king" or *cakravarti*, etc., right up to the reappearance of these signifiers in the "Olympian" assumptions of the ancient Roman idea of State and Empire. The Roman Empire, too, had its sacred contents, which were systematically misunderstood or undervalued not only by Christendom, but also by the writers of "positive" history. Even the Emperor-cult had the sense of a hierarchical unity at the top of a pantheon, which was a series of separate territorial and ancestral cults belonging to the non-Roman peoples, which were freely respected so long as they kept within their normal boundaries. Finally, concerning the "pagan" unity of the two powers, spiritual and temporal, this was very far from meaning that they were fused as a "solar" race understood it, it expressed the superior rights that must accrue to the spiritual authority at the center of any normal state; thus it was something quite different from the emancipation and "supremacy" of a merely secular state. If we were to make similar amendments in the spirit of true objectivity, the possibilities would be overwhelming.

Further Misunderstandings Concerning the "Pagan" World-View

This having been said, there remains the real possibility of transcending certain aspects of Christianity. But one must be quite clear: the Latin term "transcendere" means literally leaving something behind as one rises upwards, and not downwards! It is worth repeating that the principal thing is not the rejection of Christianity: it is not a matter of showing the same incomprehension towards it as Christianity itself has shown, and largely continues to show, towards ancient paganism. It would rather be a matter of completing Christianity by means of a higher and an older heritage, eliminating some of its aspects and emphasizing other, more important ones, in which this faith does not necessarily contradict the universal concepts of pre-Christian spirituality.

This, alas, is not the path taken by the radical circles we have mentioned. Many of these neopagans seem to have fallen into a trap deliberately set for them, often ending up by advocating and defending ideas that more or less correspond to that invented, nature-bound, particularistic pagandom, lacking light and transcendence, which was the polemical creation of a Christian misunderstanding of the pre-Christian world, and which is based, at most, on a few scattered elements of that world in its decline and devolution. And as if this were not enough, people often resort to an anti-Catholic polemic which, whatever its political justification, often drags out and adapts the old clichés of a purely modern, rationalist and enlightenment type that have been well used by Liberalism, Democracy, and Freemasonry. This was also the case, to a degree, with H. S. Chamberlain, and it appears again in a certain Italian movement that has been trying to connect racial thinking with the "idealistic" doctrine of immanence.

There is a general and unmistakable tendency in neo-paganism to create a new, superstitious mysticism, based on the glorification of immanence, of Life and Nature, which is in the sharpest contrast to that Olympian and heroic ideal of the great Aryan cultures of pre-Christian antiquity. It would indicate much more a turning towards the materialistic, maternal, and telluric side, if it did not exhaust itself in foggy and dilettantish philosophizing. To give an example, we might ask what exactly is meant by this "Nature," on which these groups are so keen? It is little use to point out that it is certainly not the Nature that was experienced and recognized by ancient, traditional man, but a rational construct of the French Encyclopedist period. It was the Encyclopedists who, with definitely subversive and revolutionary motives, made up the myth of Nature as "good," wise, and wholesome, in opposition to the rottenness of every human "Culture." Thus we can see that the optimistic nature myth of Rousseau and the Encyclopedists marches in the same ranks as "natural right," universalism, liberalism, humanitarianism, and the denial of any positive and structured form of sovereignty. Moreover, the myth in question has absolutely no basis in natural history. Every honest scientist knows that there is no room for "Nature" in the framework of his theories, which have as their object the determination of purely abstract equivalences and mathematical relationships. As far as biological research and genetics are concerned, we can already see the disequilibrium that would occur the moment one held certain laws to be final, when they only apply to a partial aspect of reality. What people call "Nature" today has nothing to do with what nature meant to the traditional, solar man, or to the knowledge of it that was accessible to such a man thanks to his Olympian and regal position. There is no sign of this whatever in the advocates of this new mysticism.

Misunderstandings of more or less the same kind, arise regarding political thought. Paganism is here often used as the synonym for a merely worldly and yet exclusive concept of sovereignty, which turns the relationships upside-down. We have already seen that in the ancient states, the unity of the two powers meant something quite different. It provided the basis for the spiritualization of politics, whereas neo-paganism results in actually politicizing the spiritual, and thereby treading once again the false path of the Gallicans and Jacobins. In contrast, the ancient concept of State and Empire always showed a connection to the Olympian idea.

What shall we think of the attitude that regards Jewry, Rome, the Catholic Church, Freemasonry, and Communism as more or less one and the same thing, just because their presuppositions differ from the plain thinking of the Folk? The Folk's thinking along these lines threatens to lose itself in the dark, where no differentiation is possible any more. It shows that it has lost the genuine feeling for the hierarchy of values, and that it cannot escape the crippling alternative of destructive internationalism and nationalistic particularism, whereas the traditional understanding of the Empire is superior to both these concepts.

To restrict ourselves to a single example: Catholic dogmatism actually fulfils a useful preventive role by stopping worldly mysticism and suchlike eruptions from below from passing a certain frontier; it makes a strong dam that protects the area where transcendent knowledge and the genuinely supranatural and non-human elements reign--or at least where they should reign. One may well criticize the way in which such transcendence and knowledge have been understood in Christianity, but one cannot cross over to a "profane" criticism that seizes on some polemical weapon or other, fantasizes over the supposed Aryan nature of the immanence-doctrine, of "natural religion," the cult of "life," etc., without really losing one's level: in short, one does not thereby attain the world of primordial beginnings, but that of the Counter-Tradition or the telluric and primitive modes of being. This would in fact be the very best way of re-converting those people with the best "pagan" talents to Catholicism!

One must be wary of falling into the misunderstandings and errors that we have mentioned, which basically serve only to defend the common enemy. One must try to develop the capacity to place oneself at that level where didactic confusion cannot reach, and where all dilettantism and arbitrary intellectual activity are excluded; where one resists energetically every influence from confused, passionate desires and from the aggressive pleasure in polemics; where, finally and fundamentally, nothing counts but the precise, strict, objective knowledge of the spirit of the Primordial Tradition.